

ORIGINAL

#20 / "Gila"

REMARKS

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(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

IN RESPONSE TO THE KIND INVITATION TENDERED BY DR. ZUBICKI, I  
THOUGHT I'D COME BY TO CHAT WITH YOU TODAY ABOUT SOME OF THE THINGS THAT  
CONCERN THE SURGEON GENERAL, WHOEVER THAT PERSON MAY BE. RIGHT NOW, I'M  
IN THAT POSITION AND I THINK IT'S GOOD, EVERY NOW AND THEN, TO LET  
PEOPLE KNOW OF THE CONCERNS I HAVE...  
THE ISSUES THAT I CARE ABOUT...AND HOW THOSE CONCERNS HELP SHAPE  
NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY IN THIS COUNTRY.

FIRST OF ALL, YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN SOMEONE  
SPECIFICALLY CONCERNED WITH PUBLIC HEALTH WHO HAS BEEN PRIVY TO THE  
HIGHEST COUNCILS OF OUR NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. LET ME SKETCH A LITTLE  
HISTORY FOR YOU.

IN 1798, OUR SECOND PRESIDENT, JOHN ADAMS, ESTABLISHED THE FIRST MARINE HOSPITAL IN HIS HOME DISTRICT OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, AS PART OF A NEW PLAN TO STOP THE SPREAD OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES BROUGHT TO OUR SHORES FROM FOREIGN PORTS. IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF WHAT WE NOW KNOW AS THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE.

WHEN HIS VICE-PRESIDENT, THOMAS JEFFERSON, BECAME OUR THIRD PRESIDENT, HE APPOINTED A CONTROVERSIAL YOUNG DOCTOR NAMED BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE TO BE THE NEW DIRECTOR OF THE BOSTON MARINE HOSPITAL. WATERHOUSE WAS AN ENERGETIC BUT CONTROVERSIAL CHARACTER. JUST A FEW YEARS BEFORE HE HAD ENTHUSIASTICALLY INTRODUCED TO THE UNITED STATES A REVOLUTIONARY NEW TECHNOLOGY CALLED "VACCINATION," WHICH HAD JUST BEEN DEVELOPED IN ENGLAND BY DR. EDWARD JENNER.

AS THE NEW HEAD OF THE BOSTON HOSPITAL, WATERHOUSE PLUNGED RIGHT IN AND SET ONE PRECEDENT AFTER ANOTHER:

\* HE ESTABLISHED THE FIRST OUT-PATIENT SERVICE FOR MERCHANT SEAMEN WHO DIDN'T NEED TO BE HOSPITALIZED, AND THUS HE RADICALLY EXPANDED THE RANGE OF FEDERAL MEDICAL CARE.

\* HE WROTE THE FIRST REGULATIONS GOVERNING THE WAY FEDERAL MEDICINE WOULD BE DISPENSED...WHO WOULD DISPENSE IT...AND WHO WOULD BE ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE IT. WE'RE STILL WRITING THOSE KINDS OF REGULATIONS FOR MEDICARE AND MEDICAID.

\* DR. WATERHOUSE WAS ALSO A FACULTY MEMBER OF HARVARD AT THIS TIME. HE SET UP SMALL CLINICS WITHIN THE BOSTON MARINE HOSPITAL, ESTABLISHED A SYSTEM OF STUDENT INTERNSHIPS, AND IN EFFECT TURNED THE BOSTON MARINE HOSPITAL INTO THIS COUNTRY'S FIRST "TEACHING HOSPITAL," AND G.W. IS IN THAT TRADITION.

WATERHOUSE WAS BRILLIANT BUT ABRASIVE. HE WAS SAFE DURING JEFFERSON'S TWO TERMS. BUT IN 1809 OUR FOURTH PRESIDENT, JAMES MADISON, LISTENED TO THE ARGUMENTS OF THE MEDICAL ESTABLISHMENT AND FIRED DR. WATERHOUSE FROM GOVERNMENT SERVICE.

TWO HUNDRED YEARS HAVE PASSED, BUT THE PATTERN OF THOSE EARLY DAYS HAS BEEN REPEATED AGAIN AND AGAIN. FOR EXAMPLE...

-- FIRST, THE MARINE HOSPITAL SERVICE EVOLVED INTO THE UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE, WHICH IS A UNIFORMED, QUASI-MILITARY SERVICE. AS SURGEON GENERAL OF THE P.H.S., I HOLD THE NAVY FLAG RANK OF VICE ADMIRAL. MY DEPUTY, DR. FAYE ABDELLAH, IS A REAR ADMIRAL, AS IS EACH OF THE 50 ASSISTANT SURGEONS GENERAL IN THE P.H.S. THE U.S. NAVY, OF COURSE, HAS ITS OWN MEDICAL SERVICE, BUT THE P.H.S. PROVIDES THE MEDICAL SERVICE FOR THE COAST GUARD AND FOR THE NATIONAL OCEANOGRAPHIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION, "NOAA." SO THE ORIGINAL "MARINE" CONNOTATION IS STILL VERY MUCH IN EVIDENCE.

-- SECOND, NEARLY EVERY AMERICAN PRESIDENT SINCE JOHN ADAMS HAS BEEN PERSONALLY KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT -- AND PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN -- MATTERS AFFECTING THE HEALTH OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

-- THIRD, MEDICINE AND POLITICS BECAME ENGAGED EARLY IN OUR HISTORY AND HAVE REMAINED ENGAGED EVER SINCE. THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PHYSICIANS IN AMERICA HAVE NEVER BEEN SATISFIED JUST TO HAVE A LARGE AND RICH MEDICAL PRACTICE. THEY HAVE ALSO LABORED -- OFTEN FOR LITTLE OR NO PERSONAL GAIN AND SOMETIMES AT GREAT PERSONAL RISK -- TO AFFECT THE COURSE OF PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY AND, HENCE, THE WELFARE OF THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS. SOME PEOPLE GET UPSET WHEN THEY SEE PHYSICIANS GET ACTIVE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS...BUT IT HAPPENS TO BE AN OLD AND HONORABLE AMERICAN TRADITION.

-- AND FOURTH AND FINALLY, EVER SINCE THE EXAMPLE SET BY BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE, THE ROLE OF FEDERAL MEDICINE HAS BEEN TO LEAD, NOT MERELY TO FOLLOW. MOST SURGEONS GENERAL HAVE BEEN UP TO THE TASK...A FEW HAVE NOT. SOMETIMES THEIR COLLEAGUES IN PRIVATE PRACTICE HAVE BEEN VERY SUPPORTIVE. AND OTHER TIMES THEY'VE BEEN VERY ANGRY.

I WAS ONLY VAGUELY AWARE OF THIS HISTORY WHEN PRESIDENT REAGAN ASKED ME TO BE HIS SURGEON GENERAL IN 1981.

THOMAS JEFFERSON HAD BOLDLY PICKED BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE AS HIS CHIEF PHYSICIAN, TO THE CONSTERNATION OF ORGANIZED MEDICINE. AND RONALD REAGAN REACHED OVER THE RANKS OF ORGANIZED MEDICINE TO PICK C. EVERETT KOOP, A CONTROVERSIAL AND OVERAGE PEDIATRIC SURGEON FROM PHILADELPHIA, TO BE HIS SURGEON GENERAL.

I'M THE 13<sup>TH</sup> MAN TO HOLD THIS JOB.

NOW I CAN GO ON AND TELL YOU WHAT I DO AND I KNOW YOU WON'T BE SO SURPRISED. YOU'LL UNDERSTAND THAT IT'S ALL VERY MUCH IN CHARACTER WITH THE HISTORIC NATURE OF THE OFFICE.

THE FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT THING I DO IS TO TALK TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ABOUT THEIR HEALTH. MOST OF THE TIME I TRY TO DO THIS THROUGH THE PHYSICIANS AND NURSES AND PSYCHIATRISTS AND OTHERS WHO PRACTICE HANDS-ON MEDICINE. BUT I OFTEN TALK DIRECTLY TO THEM AS WELL, VIA RADIO AND TELEVISION MESSAGES AND NEWSPAPER REPORTS.

IT'S MY JOB TO TELL THE FACTS AS I SEE THEM. FOR EXAMPLE, SMOKING IS BAD. "IF YOU SMOKE, YOU SHOULD QUIT, AND IF YOU DON'T SMOKE, DON'T START." BUT I'VE ASKED MORE. I'VE ASKED THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE IN GENERAL TO MAKE THE UNITED STATES "SMOKE-FREE BY THE YEAR 2000."

YOU MAY RECALL THAT DR. LUTHER TERRY PUBLISHED THE FIRST SURGEON GENERAL'S REPORT ON SMOKING AND HEALTH IN 1964. THERE HAVE BEEN 18 SUCH REPORTS IN ALL. THE LAST 4 REPORTS HAVE BEEN UNDER MY SIGNATURE.

BUT EVEN IN THIS ACTIVITY, WE'VE BEEN FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR OLD FRIEND, BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE. IN 1805 WATERHOUSE PUBLISHED A REPORT "SHEWING THE EVIL TENDENCY OF THE USE OF TOBACCO."

I HAVE ALSO WARNED THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ABOUT THE VERY SUSPICIOUS AND SERIOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASPIRIN AND REYE SYNDROME IN CHILDREN.



I'VE RAISED THE ALARM ABOUT THE GROWING USE OF COCAINE, PARTICULARLY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE.

I'VE BEEN AN ADVOCATE FOR THE DISABLED, ESPECIALLY DISABLED CHILDREN. MOST OF WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD OR READ ABOUT "BABY DOE" HAS EITHER INVOLVED ME OR HAS SOMEHOW BEEN INFLUENCED BY WHAT I BELIEVE AND WHAT I HAVE SAID.

I'VE SPOKEN OUT ABOUT THE NEED FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS -- ESPECIALLY YOUNG PHYSICIANS AS MOST OF YOU ARE -- TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE NEEDS OF OUR ELDERLY. I HAVE URGED THEM TO MODERNIZE THEIR PRACTICES AND ELIMINATE THEIR "AGE-IST" PREJUDICES, IN ORDER TO PROVIDE OLD PEOPLE WITH THE QUALITY HEALTH CARE THEY NEED AND DESERVE.

AND I'VE URGED THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNITY TO COME UP WITH A PHILOSOPHY OF AGING THAT MIGHT SERVE AS THE UNDERPINNING FOR THIS QUALITY HEALTH CARE.

I HAVE STEPPED IN TO PROVIDE LEADERSHIP IN THE AREA OF VENTILATOR-DEPENDENCY, GETTING GOVERNMENT PEOPLE IN MEDICARE AND MEDICAID TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE ON THIS AND OTHER SIMILAR PROBLEMS.

I BROUGHT TOGETHER ALL THE CONFLICTING INTERESTS IN THE FIELD OF ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION AND GOT THEM TO NEGOTIATE A COLLECTIVE ARRANGEMENT THAT WOULD ASSURE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE THAT THIS NEW TECHNOLOGY WOULD EVOLVE ACCORDING TO THE PUBLIC'S NEEDS, AND NOT MERELY THE NEEDS OF THE SPECIFIC PARTIES AT INTEREST, SUCH AS THE SURGEONS, THE ORGAN "HARVESTERS," OR THE BIG MEDICAL CENTERS.

AND MOST RECENTLY I CALLED TOGETHER OVER 150 EXPERTS IN MEDICINE, PUBLIC HEALTH, NURSING, LAW, AND SOCIAL SERVICES TO FOCUS ON INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE AS A MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM IN AMERICAN SOCIETY. THEY CAME UP WITH 156 RECOMMENDATIONS AND WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF BEGINNING TO CARRY THEM OUT...AGAIN, WITH THE HELP OF PHYSICIANS, NURSES, SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS, AND OTHERS.

THE SURGEON GENERAL ALSO HAS A VARIETY OF RESPONSIBILITIES IN INTERNATIONAL HEALTH, TO WHICH I ATTACH A VERY HIGH PRIORITY. YOU MAY KNOW THAT MORE THAN 40 COUNTRIES, OVER ONE-THIRD OF THE U.N. MEMBER STATES, STILL HAVE INFANT MORTALITY RATES OF MORE THAN 100 PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS, ABOUT WHAT OURS WAS A CENTURY AGO. IN 32 COUNTRIES, THE AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY IS LESS THAN 50 YEARS OF AGE. I BELIEVE WE HAVE A MORAL OBLIGATION TO DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO HELP THOSE COUNTRIES IMPROVE UPON THOSE STATISTICS.

THE UNITED STATES IS A KEY MEMBER OF THE U.N. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION -- W.H.O. -- AND ITS AFFILIATE IN THIS HEMISPHERE, THE PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION, OR "PAHO." I AM A REGULAR MEMBER OF THE U.S. DELEGATION TO THE ANNUAL W.H.O MEETINGS IN GENEVA.

AMONG OUR MAJOR EFFORTS THESE DAYS HAS BEEN TO GET THE NATIONS OF WORLD BEHIND THE DISSEMINATION OF ORAL RE-HYDRATION THERAPY AND ALSO TO SUPPORT AN EXPANDED PROGRAM TO IMMUNIZE THE WORLD'S CHILDREN AGAINST THE KILLER INFECTIOUS DISEASES OF CHILDHOOD.

YOU ARE PROBABLY AWARE THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS FEWER THAN 5 CASES OF POLIO A YEAR. WE'RE WORKING WITH "PAHO" TO SEE IF WE CAN ACHIEVE THIS FOR THE ENTIRE WESTERN HEMISPHERE BY THE YEAR 1990. AND WE JUST MIGHT DO IT.

WE ALSO PROVIDE HEALTH-RELATED SERVICES UNDER 13 TREATIES AND MORE THAN 30 BILATERAL AGREEMENTS WITH COUNTRIES SUCH AS MAINLAND CHINA, ISRAEL, EGYPT, THE SOVIET UNION, ZAIRE, AND INDIA.

MY PREDECESSOR, DR. WATERHOUSE, WAS THE FIRST AMERICAN PHYSICIAN TO PUSH FOR VACCINATION AS THE WAY TO ERADICATE THE SCOURGE OF SMALLPOX ALMOST 200 YEARS AGO. ODDLY ENOUGH, THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE -- THE LEGACY, YOU MIGHT SAY, OF BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE -- WAS THE LEAD AGENCY THAT VACCINATED TENS OF MILLIONS OF CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD IN THE 1960s AND 1970s.

THAT EFFORT ULTIMATELY LED TO THE HISTORIC ANNOUNCEMENT BY W.H.O. IN 1979 THAT SMALLPOX HAD BEEN ELIMINATED AS AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE OF MANKIND. THE HUMAN RACE HAD NEVER ACCOMPLISHED SUCH A THING BEFORE.

THAT'S A RUN-DOWN OF SOME OF THE PRIORITY ACTIVITIES THAT COMMAND A GOOD DEAL OF MY WORK-DAY. THEY ARE, YOU MIGHT HAVE NOTICED, ACTIVITIES THAT TAKE PLACE OUTSIDE AND BEYOND THE FEDERAL SERVICE. BUT I HAVE A RATHER FULL AGENDA OF ACTIVITIES INSIDE THE FEDERAL SERVICE, ALSO.

FIRST AND FOREMOST, I AM THE TITULAR HEAD OF A COMMISSIONED CORPS OF NEARLY 6,000 PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE OFFICERS.

I ALSO SERVE ON A VARIETY OF GOVERNING BOARDS, SUCH AS THAT OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES, CO-LOCATED ON THE GROUNDS OF THE BETHESDA NAVAL HOSPITAL, AND OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE, A DIVISION OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH.

I FUNCTION IN A SMILIAR CAPACITY WITH...

THE ARMED FORCES INSTITUTE OF PATHOLOGY

THE NATIONAL BOARD OF MEDICAL EXAMINERS

THE PROGRAM OF EMERGENCY MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO SAFETY AND  
TRAFFIC, OR SIMPLY "MAST"

AND, TO KEEP UP MY CONTACTS WITH ORGANIZED MEDICINE, I AM A  
MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES OF THE A.M.A.

I'M ALSO A MEMBER OF THE DEFENSE HEALTH COUNCIL, ALONG WITH THE  
SURGEONS GENERAL OF THE OTHER UNIFORMED SERVICES. AMONG MY CONCERNS  
WITHIN THAT COUNCIL IS THE ABILITY OF OUR NATION TO RESPOND TO A  
NATIONAL NON-MILITARY HEALTH EMERGENCY, SUCH AS A MAJOR CALIFORNIA  
EARTHQUAKE OR A HURRICANE AND MAJOR FLOODING ALONG THE GULF COAST.

MY INITIAL NOMINATION AND CONFIRMATION PROCESS TOOK 8 LONG MONTHS BACK IN 1981. BUT, AFTER HAVING ME ON THE JOB FOR 4 YEARS, THE PRESIDENT WAS SATISFIED ENOUGH TO NOMINATE ME FOR A SECOND TERM. THIS TIME, THE SENATE COMMITTEE SENT MY NAME FORWARD WITHOUT A HEARING AND THE FULL SENATE VOTED "AYE" IN LESS THAN 60 SECONDS. SO I BREEZED RIGHT THROUGH.

ANY ORDINARY PERSON WOULD FEEL RELIEVED IF THAT HAPPENED. AND I MUST CONFESS THAT I'M PROUD TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO THINK AND SAY WHAT WAS ON MY MIND FOR THE PAST 4 YEARS AND STILL EARN THE GOOD OPINION OF THE PRESIDENT AND THE CONGRESS...AND SOMETIMES EVEN THE GRUDGING RESPECT OF MY COLLEAGUES IN MEDICINE.

BUT I WORRY EVERY NOW AND THEN THAT I'M BECOMING A CAPTIVE OF THE SYSTEM...THAT I MIGHT BE TURNING INTO A NON-CONTROVERSIAL MOUTHPIECE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT. THAT WOULD BE TERRIBLE AND VERY MUCH OUT OF CHARACTER FOR A U.S. SURGEON GENERAL.

WHEN I SUSPECT THAT I'M LEANING TOO FAR IN THAT DIRECTION, I ESCAPE TO NEW HAMPSHIRE AND DO PENANCE BEFORE A STEEL ENGRAVING OF THE GOOD DR. BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE.

IT ALWAYS WORKS. I ALWAYS COME BACK READY AGAIN TO TAKE UP BATTLE WITH THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM AND STAMP MY LITTLE WARNING LABELS ON ANOTHER MILLION PACKS OF CIGARETTES.

I HOPE BY THIS TIME YOU UNDERSTAND WHY I BELIEVE I'VE GOT THE BEST JOB IN AMERICAN MEDICINE. BUT IN CASE YOU DON'T, I'LL BE GLAD TO TAKE YOUR QUESTIONS.

THANK YOU.

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